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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR PRM ACTING A/S WITTEN AND AMBASSADOR JIM FOLEY
IO ACTING A/S HOOK AND PDAS WARLICK
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [UNSC](#) [IO](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH UNHCR
REPRESENTATIVES TO DISCUSS IRAQI REFUGEES

REF: BEIRUT 952

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Ambassador, PolOff, ConChief, ConOff, and the Department of Homeland Security circuit-ride team leader met with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative Stphane Jaquemet and UNHCR Senior Protection Officers, Ayaki Ito and Anna Leer on September 4. The UNHCR representatives discussed the current protection climate for Iraqi refugees, attempts by the GOL to collect penalties and fees from departing refugees, and future case referrals to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). End Summary.

REFUGEE PROTECTION CLIMATE

2. (SBU) Jaquemet said that conditions in Lebanon for Iraqi refugees were improving but were still far from ideal. He noted a recent change by the GOL towards a more genial approach to Iraqi refugees, with fewer refugees arrested and more released from detention. He attributed this change in attitude, in part, to increased USG engagement on the issue. He lauded USG efforts to resettle more Iraqis to the U.S. and suggested that increased efforts to resettle Iraqis were assuaging GOL fears that the number of refugees would continue to grow and eventually destabilize the country.

3. (SBU) While Jaquemet was sanguine about the improving protection climate at the ground level, he expressed concern over a lack of clarity by GOL leaders on policy regarding Iraqi refugees and said the GOL had not made important decisions regarding the status of refugees going forward. He specifically cited the GOL's inability to reach a decision on whether to continue a policy of granting to Iraqi detainees released from detention two three-month temporary visas, as opposed to deporting them. This policy, which is scheduled to expire at the end of September, has temporarily prevented many Iraqis illegally in Lebanon from being deported.

FEES AND PENALTIES FOR REFUGEES

4. (SBU) Jaquemet also discussed the increased attempts by Surete Generale, the agency that administers immigration

controls, to collect fines and penalties from the increased numbers of Iraqis resettling to the U.S. For example, in the past only Iraqis without valid Iraqi G-series passports were required to acquire a GOL-issued laissez-passer, at the cost of \$40, in order to depart Lebanon. According to UNHCR, the GOL is now pushing for all Iraqi refugees, including those who hold valid G-series passports, to have a GOL-issued laissez-passer before departing Lebanon. The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), PRM,s overseas processing entity, currently pays for the laissez-passers for resettling Iraqis.

15. (SBU) The UNHCR representatives also said that Surete Generale is systematically imposing penalties on almost every Iraqi who is leaving Lebanon for resettlement. Surete Generale is imposing on average a \$630 fine for Iraqis who entered Lebanon illegally and a \$200 fine for Iraqis who overstayed on their visa. Typically the refugees accrue \$500 in fines, penalties and other charges before they are allowed to leave Lebanon for resettlement. Whereas in the past Surete Generale would often waive these penalties, the GOL has become much more stringent in its application of penalties. UNHCR has helped to pay these penalties for underprivileged refugees, but at the expense of diverting resources that were allocated for education and other critical refugee services.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT GOING FORWARD

16. (SBU) In discussing the timing of upcoming DHS circuit

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rides to Lebanon, the UNHCR officials were confident that they would be able to refer 2,000 Iraqi refugees to the USRAP during fiscal-year 2009. Jaquemet also noted that, contrary to his own earlier concerns, UNHCR continues to interview refugees that present compelling cases for resettlement. Because of the relatively small number of Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, Jaquemet had speculated that the number of refugees that would meet the high standard for resettlement would diminish after the first few DHS circuit rides. However, based on UNHCR,s and the DHS team,s assessment, the number of &compelling cases8 has not diminished.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) Ambassador is scheduled to meet with Surete Generale Director, Major General Wafiq Jezzini, soon. She will raise the issues of extending the GOL,s policy of granting two three-month visas for Iraqi refugees released from detention and getting waivers for laissez-passers and penalties for Iraqis seeking to resettle. End comment.

SISON